

## Points of View and View-points: Roggeveen's Visit Revised

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Of the four expeditions known to have touched Easter Island between 1722 and 1786 many written records are available. Some reports are very scientific, including maps that show the exact landing spots. This is unfortunately not the case in regard to the Dutch visit of 1722. Although it is well known that Roggeveen's fleet came to the island on April 5, 1722, and an abstract of his journal was published in English by B.G. Corney in 1908, little importance was given to it by the general public.

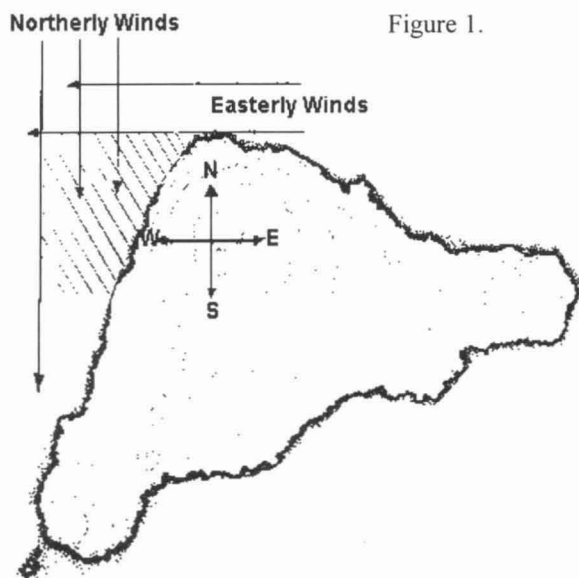


Figure 1.

In order to let *Rapa Nui Journal* readers know more about the Dutch expedition, Mr. Herbert von Saher wrote a short version of Roggeveen's life, his expedition and the stay at Easter Island. It is not clear whether von Saher based his article (*RNJ* 4(3):33-35,45) on the old Dutch version or Corney's translation, as no bibliography is given.

Von Saher (1990a:34) reasoned that Roggeveen cruised along the west coast of the island: "The fleet cruised along the lee side of the island; as an easterly wind was reported, this must have been along the west coast." The supposed anchorage is mentioned as well (*ibid.*: 35). "But a strong northerly wind started, making their anchorage site on the northwest coast dangerous" (fig.1). Von Saher did not write about the westerly wind which, according to Roggeveen, saved the ships (Corney 1908:24). This notation about wind obviously contradicts him, as the ships would have been driven onto the rocks of the western coast by a westerly wind. Another factor which escaped von Saher, probably because he had not visited Easter Island at the time he wrote the article, was that the northwest coast has steep cliffs, in some cases up to 100 meters high. Von Saher (1990a:35) stated: "... climbing over the cliff on the shore." The Dutch claimed to have climbed over some rocks, but not up a cliff (Corney 1908:11).

If a "strong northerly wind" made their anchorage unsafe and a westerly wind kept them from being pushed towards the

shore, then that anchorage had to be in front of the north coast, as the so-called north coast runs approximately WNW-ESE, with a few tips of land (lava flows and volcanoes) breaking that theoretical straight line (fig.2). Von Saher's (1990b:50) second assumption regarding the location where Behrens and Roggeveen anchored and went ashore is based on an almost one-dimensional reading of maps. Citing Bouman: "... near the coast in the middle of the island ... we dropped anchor ... Here we had the northern corner of the island straight east and the northwestern corner west/northwest ... these 2 corners forming a small bay ...". Von Saher points out that it is technically impossible, so he turns to Roggeveen: "Roggeveen gives the correct bearing in his journal", thereby accepting that they were half-way between the western and eastern points (Corney 1908:10).



Figure 2.

Von Saher (1990b:50) then looked at a modern map and, deciding that Ana Nga Heu and Poike are those points, wrote that "... that bay [anchorage] can only be Anakena." To state that Ana Nga Heu and Poike are the northern and eastern points of Easter Island can be compared to claiming that, while the Carlsbad Cave is the easternmost, Florida is the southernmost point of the continental United States. Actually, according to von Saher's points of reference, the anchorage should have been to the east of Ovahe (see different simplistic ways of halving the N-E distance in fig.2).

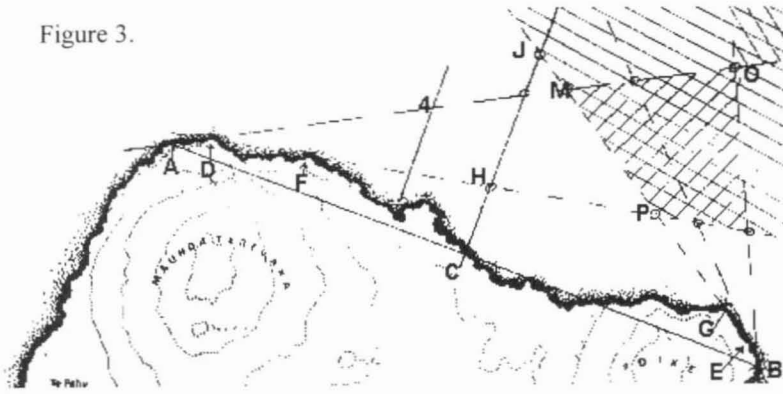
What has not been taken into consideration and is a major fault, is the fact that the Dutch were not able to look at the island from above, as when looking at a map. They were out at sea, looking at the island in front of them, with no map available for they were the first or second Europeans to come to Easter Island.

Not only is von Saher wrong in the selection of points of reference, Roggeveen as well was erroneously referring to his northern-most visible point as the western tip of Easter Island. To comply with his information of seeing western and eastern tips of the island, you would have to be some 18 miles south of Rano Kau. If you try this in front of the north coast, you would already be out of sight of Easter Island with Te Kari Kari and Cabo Cumming as westernmost and easternmost points).

To stress the point of imprecise information, one only has to look at the maps prepared by the Spanish expedition under González de Haedo 46 years later. We can see how crude the result of professional work was at that time.

Other famous maps attributed to Cook, La Pérouse, Dundas, and Gana all show great discrepancies, permitting the

Figure 3.



reader to consider North Cape, Punta Santa Ana or others as the northernmost point, while Cabo San Felipe, East Cape and other unnamed points could each be the easternmost one.

Looking now at modern maps one will find that, due to the irregular coastline, in order to see Ana Nga Heu and Poike and still be in front of Anakena one must be various miles out (see point 4 in fig.3). According to von Saher (1990b:50) the ships were in the bay--something that in itself is very difficult to imagine for the bay is quite small.

To make things easier, let us consider another two points, Punta San Juan [the point the Spaniards named Punta San Juan is not the same as the Chilean Punta San Juan; the former is next to Anakena, the latter next to Papa Tekena] and Cabo O'Higgins (F and G in fig.3). To be able to see A and E and still be on a line with the middle point Bouman talks about (*RNJ* 4(4):50), one has to be 3 to 4 miles away from the coast (see point J in fig.3). If one does not consider the distance between A and E to be important, then point M will be your closest spot to the coast. Coming even closer to shore we see that because of Punta San Juan (F), point P is as close to shore one can be and still see the northernmost point (D= O'Toki ?) and Cabo O'Higgins (=G). The shaded area shows where the ships should have been.

In any case, it can be seen that with each new point of reference through which we try to improve our calculation, the anchorage moves not only closer to shore, but is also each time located further to the east.

If one intends to anchor in front of the north coast, one will have to be closer to shore than .9 miles or the water will be too deep and, as if so close, one will not be able to see Cabo Cumming; instead Cabo O'Higgins (=G) will be visible. At the same time, at the other end of the north coast, and because of the natural coastline and the cliffs along the shore, it is neither Cabo Norte, nor Ana Nga Heu, nor the rocks near Hanga Oteo, but the lava-flow close to Papa Te Kena that one conceives as the northernmost point. Anything to the west or north of Papa Te Kena is hidden by it, due to the position so close to shore.

If one then mistakes Punta San Juan to be the northernmost point and considers oneself to be halfway between northernmost and easternmost visible points, one is actually in front of Ahu Heki'i (fig.4). The shaded area in fig. 4 shows where the ships would have been, permitting 10% of an error in each direction.

But if one is even closer to shore, then the northernmost promontory seems to be Punta Rosalia (=U), close to

Anakena. Permitting once again an error of 10%, the ships would then have anchored in front of Maunga Kororau (see shaded area in fig.5).

Having looked at all these maps (figs. 1-5), and apart from the suggested site of Anakena, there are others further to the east, and these are based on different points of view. Taking into consideration the amount of people seen by the Dutch ashore and in the water (Behrens talks about "thousands") (Corney 1908:133), plus the tapu surrounding the Ariki Mau that, according to Métraux (1971), permitted commoners to come to Anakena only on specific dates of the year and, according to Englert (1948:42), covered an area from Ahu Runga to Hira Moko and to Hanga Ohiro, it is inconceivable that Roggeveen could have landed at Anakena. Based on the description of the landing-place ("... we ... clambered over rocks, which are very numerous on the sea margin ...") (Corney 1908:11) it could not have been either Anakena or Ovahe, otherwise the Dutch would have mentioned a reddish cliff and the sand. More probably they had reached an area close to La Pérouse.

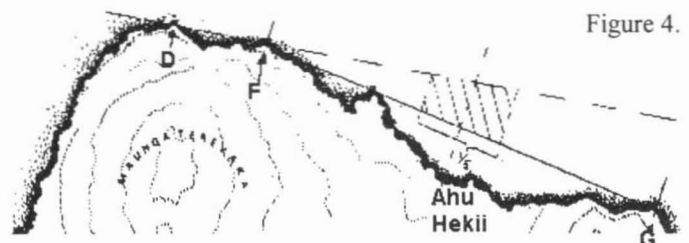


Figure 4.

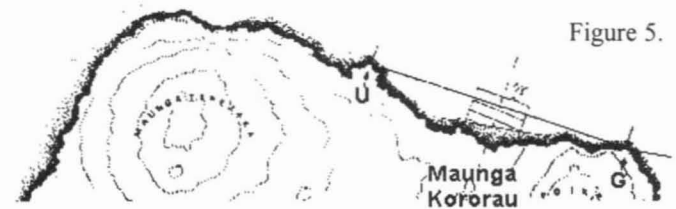


Figure 5.

## Conclusion

In order to sort out which of these possible anchorage sites was used and to clarify the imprecise information regarding the landing site, two very simple actions could be taken:

1. To spot the actual anchorage, consider maps 3, 4, and 5 and add four pieces of information the Dutch gave in their reports: a) the distance from shore estimated to be  $\frac{1}{4}$  mile (*RNJ* 4(3):34; Corney 1908:10);

b) the depths at which they anchored, 22 fathoms, (Corney *ibid.*); 23 fathoms, (Bouman in von Saher 1990b:50);

c) the height of statues seen ("... some of these statues were a good 30 feet in height" (Corney 1908:15-16);

d) where they dropped anchor "... the soil was grayish white sand with coral" (Bouman in von Saher 1990:50); but Roggeveen only noted "... coral bottom" (Corney 1908:10).

Englert's (1948) survey shows that there are very few *ahu* along the north coast that fall into the *ahu-moai* category: numbers 56 and 59 at Hanga Tavari, 66 at Ahu Papa Tekena,

76 at Vai Tara Kai Ua, 83 at Ahu Runga, 86 at Ahu Naunau, 87 at Ahu Ature Huki, 91 at Hanga Kihikihi, 93 at Ahu Puna Rere Takatea, 95 (ahu without given name), 101 at Ahu O'Hae, 104 at Ahu Te Pito Kura, 106 at Ahu Hekii, 107 (next to Hekii), 115 at Ahu Hanga Papa, 132 at Ahu Tau a Ure, 139 at Ahu Hanga Tau Vaka, 145 at Ahu Mahatua. Most of these ahu only have small moai except for Ahu Te Pito Kura. All this adds up to the map in fig. 6. Having narrowed down the possible sites even more, there is only one more thing to be done to verify which was the correct site the Dutch selected for their anchorage: searching those sites for the anchor that

then one must consider two different scenarios:

1. some bullets missed islanders;
2. all shots fired found their human targets.

In the first case one would have to use the metal detector in the close vicinity of the proposed landing-sites. Hopefully, islanders in 1722 did not take them as souvenirs, thereby having them scattered across the island.

In the second case, it can be supposed that the bullets stayed in the bodies of the victims and were buried or cremated with the islanders. It can safely be assumed that at least one bullet will have to be close to the landing site, as the first islander to come aboard, who should have been from the village where the incident took place, was among the fatally wounded and is most probably buried nearby.

If a skeleton could be or has already been found with a bullet amongst the bones, there would be a probability of this islander having taken part in the greeting of Behrens and Roggeveen, as very few other incidents involving gun-shots are known. At the same time the tomb would probably be very close to the landing site of the Dutch. All this remains to be seen. What is needed is someone to finance this unspectacular work, donate or lend his/her metal detector, or be willing to dive for the anchors. The basic information to locate the artifacts is at least now given.

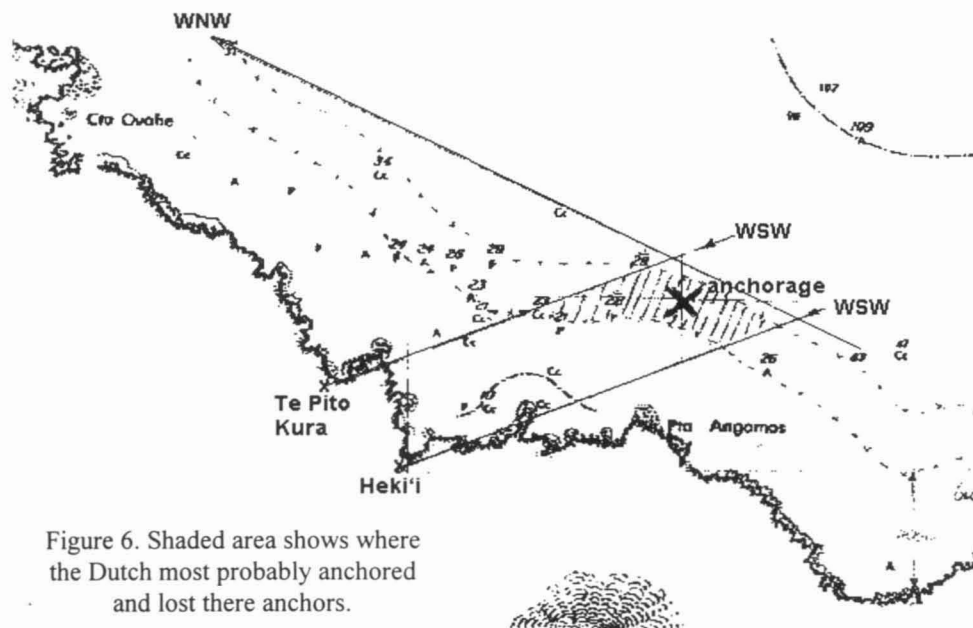


Figure 6. Shaded area shows where the Dutch most probably anchored and lost there anchors.

the *Thienhoven* lost on April 11, and the anchor lost by the *Afrikaansche Galeij* on April 12 (Corney 1908:25, 24,137). I am inclined to believe that 'X' (fig. 6) marks the anchors, but the landing site factor still has to be added.

2. To find the landing site one would have to consider two different aspects:

a) where were important settlements along the north coast that would have permitted canoes to be launched and European rowboats to come ashore? Reading the Dutch reports, there is the following information to guide us: there were 6 or 7 dwelling huts, houses were 50 x 15 ft (Corney 1908:17, 19), and "... entrances are all directed toward the northeast" (Saher 1990b:51). Based on the map prepared by Mulloy and Figueroa and improved by the University of Chile, plus the Dutch information, one has the following possible site: Quadrangle 31, La Pérouse bay (Vargas 1992:6).

b) Foreign elements left behind by the visitors. Islanders received cloth and beads, but the artifacts to be looked for are the scissors and mirrors the Dutch gave away. They would not necessarily have been kept at/in the visited village. Islanders of the north coast might have traded them off, so they could be found anywhere. It is a pity we do not know what kind of scissors they were, perhaps they might have been used as carving utensils for the *rongorongo* tablets.

A number of islanders were shot. This, of course, introduced metal, a foreign element, into the specific area where the Dutch had stepped ashore. If it is feasible to trace those metal pieces, i.e. the bullets with the help of a metal detector,

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